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NEW NORMS FOR FDI TO DRAW CHINA NOTIFIED

- Dept for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade on Monday notified changes in FDI policy to let overseas cos with Chinese shareholding of up to 10% invest in India under automatic route
- Earlier, foreign firms with shareholders from China or other countries sharing land border with India had to seek mandatory approval to invest in India
- A decision to ease the FDI norms was taken by the Union Cabinet last week
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, govt had tightened FDI policy through Press Note 3 (2020) to curb opportunistic takeovers/ acquisitions of Indian companies
- Countries that share land borders with India are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, and Afghanistan

Press Note 3 has now been amended to ease the restrictions

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Unprecedented purge of Mamata's top babus

For the first time in West Bengal, ECI transfers state chief secretary

SUBHENDU MAITI @ Kolkata

IN an unprecedented shake-up of the top administration in West Bengal hours after announcing the poll schedule, the Election Commission of India removed Chief Secretary Nandini Chakraborty, home secretary Jagdish Prasad Meena, Director General of Police Peeyush Pandey, additional DGP (Law and Order), Vineet Goyal, and Kolkata's Commissioner of Police Supratim Sarkar in one sweep.

While major transfers do happen after the model code of conduct kicks in, never before has the cream of the administration been ejected in one go.

The transfer orders came in two batches, first the bureaucrats and then the police brass.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was acidic about the mass upheaval, particularly characterising the transfer of the chief secretary as anti-women and anti-Bengal. She called it a panic reaction by the BJP that realises it cannot win elections through democratic means.

The poll panel replaced Chakraborty with Dushyant Nariala. Sanghamitra Ghosh, secretary of the Women and Child Development department, was appointed home secretary. Siddh Nath Gupta was appointed the new DGP while Ajay Mukund Ranade and Ajay Kumar Nand took charge as ADG (Law and Order) and Kolkata's Commissioner of Police, respectively.

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at a rally in Kolkata on Monday | PTI

Big fight: Suvendu vs Didi at Bhawanipore

Suvendu Adhikari, Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly and BJP MLA from Nandigram, will take on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee from south Kolkata's Bhawanipore. He defeated her at Nandigram in the 2021 state poll| **P10**

The panel also directed that the replaced officers must not be given any portfolio related to the upcoming elections till the poll process is over.

West Bengal goes to polls in two phases on April 23 and 29.

Some senior serving and retired bureaucrats in the state said no chief secretary of West Bengal has been ever chucked out during election time since Independence.

Political observers saw in the purge the poll body's determination to keep the election process free and fair. The ECI apparently hopes to rewrite the state's chequered history of normalising election-time violence.

Besides, senior bureaucrats have been seething over Mamata's decision to appoint juniors in various important posts. For instance, former chief secretary Chakraborty and axed home secretary Meena leapfrogged over seniors to land the plum posts. Meena is junior to her successor, Ghosh, by as many as seven years.

EC officials justified the transfers, saying they aimed at ensuring administrative impartiality and strict adherence to law and order. **P10**

POLL WALL (ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS)

WB MAY GET 2,500 CAPF COMPANIES | DEOs, SSPs OF 5 ASSAM DISTRICTS SHIFTED | **POLICE OFFICERS SHUFFLED IN TN**

Not in talks with US over Strait of Hormuz: MEA

DIPAK MONDAL @ New Delhi

INDIA has not held any bilateral discussion with the US on policing the Strait of Hormuz, Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), said on Monday.

The clarification came in response to a question on whether the US had approached India to send warships to secure the Strait, which is currently under Iran's control.

On Sunday, US President Donald Trump had said that he told seven countries to send warships to the Strait.

"I'm demanding that these countries come in and protect their own territory, because it is their own territory," Trump said, claiming the shipping channel is not something the US needs because of its own access to oil. Trump said China gets about 90% of its oil from the Strait, while the US gets a minimal amount.

DAY 17 | WAR WATCH

Rakesh Kumar Sinha, special secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, said two LPG carriers—Shivalik and Nanda Devi—successfully crossed the conflict zone on March 13. Shivalik carrying 46,000 MT of LPG reached the Mundra Port on Monday evening. "20,000 MT will be unloaded at Mundra and 26,000 MT will be unloaded at Mangalore," an Adani group spokesperson said. Shivalik is carrying LPG ordered by IOCL.

Nanda Devi is expected to arrive at Kandla Port soon.

Another Indian vessel, Jag Laadki, which departed from UAE on March 14 carrying 81,000 tonnes of crude oil, will reach Mundra on Tuesday. **P12**

EXPRESS READ

Chinnaswamy gets govt nod to host IPL matches

Chennai: After a meeting with Royal Challengers Bengaluru, their event management firm DNA and the Karnataka State Cricket Association, the state government on Monday granted approval for the hosting of IPL matches at Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru. With this, the stadium will host the 2026 IPL season opener between RCB and Sunrisers Hyderabad on March 28 | **P15**

10 ICU patients killed in Cuttack hospital blaze

Cuttack: At least 10 patients died after a fire broke out in the ICU of SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack in the wee hours of Monday. Four patients, who were rescued from the ICU, are stated to be in critical condition. Around 11 hospital staff suffered injuries while trying to evacuate the patients. The fire is believed to have started from an electric short circuit in the air conditioner at around 2.40 am | **P7**

INDIA bloc cross-vote adds to NDA's RS haul

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

THE INDIA bloc suffered a major setback on Monday as instances of cross-voting and absenteeism by Opposition legislators helped the NDA consolidate its position in the elections to the Rajya Sabha.

Polling was held for 37 seats across 10 states, with the NDA winning a majority of the contested seats. While 26 candidates were elected unopposed earlier, voting took place on Monday for the remaining 11 seats—five in Bihar, four in Odisha, and two in Haryana.

NDA won eight seats—five in Bihar and three in Odisha, where BJD also won one seat.

The results of two seats in Haryana have been put on hold after both the Congress and BJP approached the Election Commission alleging violation of voting norms.

NDA secured two of the three closely fought seats in Odisha, Bihar, and Haryana. INDIA bloc had hoped to clinch the remaining three seats and moved several of its MLAs to other states to prevent defections.

In Bihar, the results dealt a blow to the Mahagathbandhan after the NDA swept all five seats—CM Nitish Kumar and new BJP president Nitin Nabin were among the winners. RJD's Amarendra Dhari Singh, lost after the alliance failed to garner the required support of at least 41 MLAs. At least four MLAs, three from Congress and one from RJD, remained absent during voting.

The battle for one extra seat in Odisha also went the Bihar way. BJP candidates Manmohan Samal and Sujeet Kumar and BJD's Santrupt Misra were elected, as did BJP-backed Independent Dilip Ray. Five MLAs of BJD and Congress cross-voted in favour of Ray.

Khader walks out over ministers not replying to queries

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Assembly on Monday witnessed a strange scene as Speaker UT Khader adjourned the House and walked out, expressing anger over ministers not replying to questions raised by legislators. Khader stated that he will not run the House till the ministers and secretaries provide an explanation.

Khader, who had been warning the government against the misdemeanour of ministers, expressed his displeasure in strongest of terms, which some legislators termed "unprecedented".

Khader's action followed Home Minister G Parameshwara tabling 84 replies against 239 unstarred questions submitted by MLAs. When angry BJP members raised the issue, Khader said he has been talking about this for the last four days. **P4**